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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000585

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/18/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BSP POPULAR COMMITTEE MOBILIZATION EFFORT'S ROCKY
START

REF: BAGHDAD 386

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The popular mobilization strand of the new Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) is off to a rocky start. In a February 14 meeting with provincial and local government leaders, tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, and Embassy staff, committee co-chairs Ahmed Chalabi and Naseer Al-Ani struggled to clarify the purpose, membership, and structure of the proposed popular committees. At the conclusion of the meeting, Chalabi requested that Baghdad local leaders submit lists of names for possible neighborhood-level committee membership. However, they did not specify what committee members' qualifications and duties would be, or how popular committees would interact with local government. While Chalabi reached out to the right people, his planning has fallen behind. End Summary.

Reaching Out For Support On Mobilization

12. (SBU) Ahmed Chalabi and Naseer Al-Ani, co-chairs for the BSP's Popular Mobilization initiative, held several meetings over the past week to develop plans and support for implementing popular committees in Baghdad (reftel). Their efforts to date culminated with a large gathering at the Mansour Media Hotel February 14 of representatives from Baghdad's provincial and local government, tribal leaders, and religious authorities to finalize planning for the effort. In addition to media representatives, nearly 100 people from neighborhoods throughout the city attended, with strong participation from both Sunni and Shia communities. Chalabi reiterated basic points about the popular committees. Although Chalabi and Naseer al-Ani are officially equal co-chairs, Chalabi did nearly all of the talking at this event.

13. (SBU) Chalabi mentioned reconciliation initiatives in Sadr City, notably the planned reopening of a Sunni mosque, saying that he hoped to see more initiatives like this in the future. He requested assistance in furthering the reopening of Islamic centers in Shaab, Ghazaliya, and Doura, cited the need for more participation by women in the popular mobilization planning process, and ended saying that, "peace and security will start from the people, not from the government." (Note: In a subsequent 15 February meeting with CDA, Chalabi emphasized the importance of mosque reopenings, and outlined his plans to do so in Ghazaliya/Shu'la and in Adhamiyah. End Note.)

Chaos and Confusion About the Plan

¶4. (C) Several common concerns emerged during the open discussion that followed Chalabi's remarks. The largest issue that was raised by participants was an overarching feeling that no clear plan exists for implementing popular mobilization in Baghdad. District Council chairmen, sheikhs, and waqf representatives alike expressed confusion, complaining that Chalabi was being unclear about the composition, size, structure, and purpose of these committees. When pressed on these issues, Chalabi was unable to respond in a consistent fashion, providing conflicting answers to questions about committee size, for example. A cacaphony briefly ensued as questions about these issues continued to be raised by more and more of the participants. Many attendees appeared wary of Chalabi's role as leader of this effort.

¶5. (C) Many attendees were also confused about the role of existing government institutions in the popular committees. Chalabi said several times that the popular committees should be supported by the government but not part of the government, but then also said that local government councils should take a leadership role in committee formation. Chalabi's description of the role of political parties in the popular committees was similarly vague. He said that parties will have an 'important role' and that party members can serve on committees, but that the committees themselves will not be politically affiliated.

Incentives and Dangers for Popular Committees

¶6. (C) Although Chalabi continued to assert that the

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committees will be "non-governmental, unarmed, unpaid, nonviolent" entities, he did mention that the program will have a budget and that money will be available to be used for "incentives." He did not elaborate on what this may entail, and downplayed the concept in his subsequent meeting with the CDA. In one of his rare comments, Naseer al-Ani stated that the popular committees should not become a tool for sectarian revenge or "false reporting"; nor should they be a tool for groups to reward one another.

Next Steps on Committee Formation?

¶7. (C) Chalabi requested that all meeting participants forward lists of possible neighborhood committee members from their areas, as well as proposals for possible committee structures to him by phone. When this provoked another outcry among attendees, Chalabi amended this request, saying instead that leaders from each sector should work together to generate lists and proposed structures, which can then be forwarded to the co-chairs. Chalabi indicated that participants would regroup on 21 February to form a workshop to parse the various lists and proposals. Chalabi provided no guidance to participants about membership qualifications or council size.

Chalabi Describes the Road Ahead

¶8. (C) In his subsequent 15 February meeting with CDA, Chalabi claimed that he has instructed the local district advisory councils (DACs) to take the lead on committee formation in anticipation of the workshop next week. He stated, however, that local government will not run the committees, nor will they staff them. He said that his team is working to codify roles and responsibilities for the committees, and that approval of his proposed budget by the IESC is important to his progress. He also agreed that, "we

will need to watch the committees to be sure that they do not go outside their bounds." Chalabi said he is thinking about the possible role of the committees in reporting and responding to allegations of impropriety by security forces, describing public frustration in both Sunni and Shia neighborhoods about past misconduct. He also made a point that the GOI's recent announcement about the proposed abrupt return of internally displaced families was unrealistic and counterproductive, and asked for Embassy assistance in promoting a more reasoned message.

Comment

19. (C) Chalabi is engaging many of the right individuals for the political mobilization initiative, but his planning has fallen behind his outreach. There is still insufficient clarity on important concrete details of the committees -- organizational structure, membership guidelines and responsibilities, and coordination with local government institutions. Prime Minister and other members of the government are suspicious of his intentions. End Comment.
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